

ILLEGIB

10 May 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUMMARY

It seems clear now as it did in the last days of April that a modest number of hard-core Communist leaders in Santo Domingo managed by superior training and tactics to win for themselves a position of considerable influence in the revolt within the first few days. Their influence within the movement grew day by day, and following the collapse of Molina's government on 27 April there appeared to be no organization within the rebel camp capable of denying them full control of the rebellion within a very few days.

At the same time, the rebel cause, enjoying as it did the backing of Bosch and the continued support of several thousand military personnel, seemed likely to prosper in the face of the ineffective and dispirited countermeasures of the loyalists military.

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The Communist Role in the Dominican Revolt

Introduction

1. The insurrection that began against the Reid government on 24 April was touched off by a group of junior and middle grade army officers, most of whom were nominally sympathetic to exiled former President Juan Bosch with whom they were in contact. "Constitutionalism," the slogan of Bosch's Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), was used by these officers as a convenient rallying cry to attract quick popular support for their effort. Indeed for a short while the rebellion had a heavy PRD flavor.

2. The PRD flavor soon began to fade, however. Within a few hours known Communists and extreme leftist civilian leaders were setting up their own paramilitary organizations. The early days of the revolt were critical. To understand fully how and why the Communists were able to react so swiftly, and how, as the intensity of the fighting increased, they were able to assume control of much of the rebel movement, it is necessary first to examine the background of the revolt.

Background

3. Juan Bosch's landslide election to the presidency in December 1962 was a measure of the popular revulsion to the years of Trujillo tyranny and of the thirst for reforms of the social and economic fabric of the country. Despite his popularity the idealistic President survived for only a stormy seven months in office. He never had the confidence of the conservative elements of the economic oligarchy primarily because of his reform proposals. He rapidly lost the confidence of the military establishment because of his permissive attitude toward the growth of Communism in the country, and his inept administration. The armed forces were also concerned because of Bosch's obvious distaste for the military.

4. The Communists and their allies flourished under the Bosch administration. It was in this period that what had earlier been tiny groups of malcontent intellectuals began to expand and to improve their organization techniques. The Moscow-oriented Dominican Popular Socialist Party (PSPD) was the most professional of the Communist groups and along with the Dominican Popular Movement (MPD), a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist party with affinities for Peiping, still today provide the hard core of Communist militants. On the eve of the current rebellion it was estimated that the PSPD had about 1,000 or more well-indoctrinated members and the MPD some 300.

5. Also beginning to expand at this time was the Castroite 14th of June Political Group (APCJ). This organization is the mass-based party of the extreme left. It now boasts some 3,000 members plus perhaps 20,000 sympathizers. Largely because of its origin as a patriotic and nationalist movement fighting the Trujillo tyranny, the APCJ still retains many non-Communist members. However, it came under effective Communist leadership as Bosch assumed power.

6. The atmosphere of the Bosch administration was naturally conducive to Communist growth. Soon after his inauguration, for example, leading Communist exiles began returning to the Dominican Republic and openly conducted party operations. Communists and Castroites were allowed to travel freely to and from Cuba and the bloc. Dato Pagan, a leading crypto Communist theoretician, was permitted to conduct a school in a government-owned building aimed at creating a cadre of ideologically-trained young Communists, despite Bosch having been urged to close the school.

7. Bosch himself was apparently convinced that his own democratic and moderate revolutionary program had such popular support that it could not be seriously threatened by the Communists, and that they would remain a harmless and isolated minority. He never had an opportunity to prove his point. After repeated warnings that he should take steps to curb the Communists, the military overthrew him in a coup headed by General Wessin y Wessin in September 1963.

8. The junta which replaced Bosch ultimately became the Reid government. It was the target of all leftist groups from the PRD to the Communists. Two extremist groups actually took up arms against the new regime. In December 1963 members of the Dominican Popular Movement (MPD) launched a guerrilla operation in the hills of the interior. They were joined by members of the pro-Castro 14th of June Political Group (APCJ). The guerrillas were rooted out by the Dominican armed forces; one of the most effective extremist leaders, Manuel Tavaréz, was killed; and many other leaders of the MPD and the APCJ were exiled. Many of the exiles found their way to Cuba where a number of them received training in guerrilla warfare and in other subversive tactics. The extremists began infiltrating back into their country in the latter half of 1964 and by early 1965 at least 45 had clandestinely re-entered the country.

9. During 1964 and early 1965 Juan Bosch's party, the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), was pressing its demands for the return to constitutional government. During this period there were growing contacts between members of Bosch's party and the MPD, the APCJ, and the Moscow-oriented Dominican Popular Socialist Party (PSPD), all of whom saw the advantage of pressing for the return of Bosch and his constitutionally-elected government. Although the leadership of Bosch's PRD claimed to be strongly opposed to any agreement with the extremists, there was evidence during March and early April of this year that middle-level PRD officials had approached the APCJ for support. A group of 33 new PRD leaders sworn in on 3 February 1965 included four of the former leaders of a now-defunct extremist party, the Nationalist Revolutionary Party (PNR), as well as several other persons known to have been associated with or to be in contact with elements of the extreme left. In short, the three extremist parties had effectively aligned themselves with the PRD's platform which demanded the return of Bosch to the presidency and at the same time were attempting, with at least some success, to infiltrate and influence the PRD.

10. The regimes which succeeded Bosch in power never developed a base of popular support. Despite the efforts by Reid to cope with some of the country's more pressing economic problems, his government was regarded by a large segment of the politically aware population as being merely the instrument of the old economic oligarchy exploiting the population.

11. In this atmosphere, Bosch retained a large following in the Dominican Republic and plotting for his return gradually intensified. Bosch's own involvement in this plotting is reliably established.

[redacted] said that Bosch was organizing a plot to overthrow the Reid government. [redacted] said the coup was to take place sometime between 18 April and 1 June. He accurately reported that Lt. Colonel Miguel Angel Hernando was to be one of the plot leaders and added that Hernando had traveled to Puerto Rico to discuss the coup plans with Bosch.

12. There had been information from other quarters prior to the coup on Bosch's involvement in the planning. [redacted]

[redacted] said [redacted] eight days before the coup--that PRD leader Pena Gomez had returned from Puerto Rico on 15 April with funds to buy support for a coup from units of the Duarte, Mella, and Sanchez Battalions of the army --the units that did, in fact, launch the coup effort. On 14 February of this year, the US received a report that Bosch had been holding meetings in Puerto Rico and New York concerning plans for a coup. Bosch's activities reportedly were financed by Diego Bordas, a wealthy businessman and former member of Bosch's cabinet. Another report indicated that on 8 February Juan Bosch and his associates among whom were Nicolas Silfa, Gustavo Espinal, Jacobo Majluta, Pedro Rodriguez Echevarria, and Rafael Fernandez Dominguez, were plotting to overthrow the Reid regime.

The Rebellion - First Phase April 24-26

13. In its earliest moments then the rebellion appeared to be a coup of anti-Reid officers, some of whom had old scores to settle with Wessin y Wessin, and some of whom were intent on returning Bosch from exile in Puerto Rico. Many PRD members who had not been involved in the plotting quickly threw in with the rebels; a provisional government headed by PRD member Rafael Molina Urena was proclaimed and Bosch was asked to return.

14. It now appears, however, that extremist and Communist groups also had advance word of the revolt. One report states that unnamed PRD leaders approached the Peiping-oriented Dominican Popular Movement (MPD) on or about 23 April, the day before the coup, and asked MPD leaders for support in a coup attempt. The report added that the PRD leaders had assured the MPD that the PRD would furnish the arms. Juan Bosch was identified as one of the leaders of the plot.

15. In any event, once news of the revolt became public on the afternoon of 24 April, these groups moved quickly to participate. Leaders of the three Communist parties began collecting arms, organizing their forces, and establishing strongpoints in Santo Domingo. A known paramilitary center of the PSPD was the residence of Buenaventura Johnson Pimentel, on Calle Espaillat. PSPD activists were observed on 25 April engaged in stockpiling efforts. It was reported on 28 April that the PSPD under cover of the darkness of the previous night relocated the headquarters at a party member's house elsewhere. However, Johnson's residence continued to be an apparently important command post and arsenal.

16. A building on the corner of Arzobispo Portes Avenue and Sanchez Street also served as a PSPD stronghold during this period. Diomedes Mercedes Garcia, Jose Rodriguez Acosta, and other PSPD leaders were observed there and were seen leading a paramilitary force armed with submachine guns and rifles, Molotov cocktails and hand grenades.

17. The APCJ is known to have established a strongpoint during this same period on Jose Gabriel Street near the Malecon in the Ciudad Nueva section of the city. A heavily armed paramilitary force was seen using this building as a base. A headquarters and strongpoint of MPD guerrillas was established on Benigue Street in the Ciudad Nueva area.

18. On the first day of the rebellion the military rebels, fearful that the high command would move rapidly against them, opened the arsenals of Santo Domingo and began passing out weapons to civilians. One such arsenal was at the "27 February" camp on the outskirts of the city where Colonel Francisco Caamano directed the release of stocked weapons. This and similar actions elsewhere on subsequent days provided the leaders of various Communist and extremist groups with the materiel they needed to supplement their own collection of arms and become a significant factor in the rebellion.

19. Buenaventura Johnson Pimentel, Juan Ducoudray Mansfield, Jaime Duran Hernando and Fidelio Despradel Roques were particularly active in acquiring weapons and equipping their followers in both the PSPD and APCJ. The last of these, Despradel, had been trained in Cuba, and according to reliable informants had received funds prior to his return to the Dominican Republic in October 1964 from the Chinese Communist Embassy in Paris. All these men appeared to be responsive to direction from Manuel Gonzalez Gonzalez, a Spanish Communist veteran of the Spanish civil war.

20. By the afternoon of Sunday, April 25, the situation in Santo Domingo had become chaotic and confused. Violence had begun but there was more feinting and jabbing than significant action. Some of the rebels, particularly among the military, were tempted by offers from the loyalists for the establishment of a new junta which would seek a solution, presumably along traditional compromise lines. The Wessin forces, apparently taken by surprise, were reacting slowly and not very effectively. In this situation the Communists were intent on strengthening popular participation in the revolt. Public address cars manned by identifiable PSPD members prowled the city directing the crowds to tactical positions.

21. At this point the PRD leaders appeared to share the initiative with rebel officers; the Communists were busying themselves with organizing the distribution of weapons to "reliable" groups and rounding up manpower for civilian militia units. It was in this period that the various Communist parties established their weapons depots and set up disbursing controls.

22. As they established their organizations to assure the military effectiveness of the civilian rebels, the Communists apparently also began to turn their attention to the political ends of the revolt. On the night of April 25th and the early morning hours of April 26 rebel leaders consulted in the captured Presidential Palace on strategy and on the composition of a provisional government. To these meetings came PSPD leaders Ariosto Sora, Milvio Perez, and Silvano Lora, as well as a Cuban-trained guerrilla fighter of the APCJ, Facundo Gomez.

23. These conversations in the palace showed for the first time not only that the Communists were intent on winning influence in the rebellion, but that they already had a degree of bargaining power.

24. A lawyer and retired army officer Rafael E. Saldana Jimenez, was acting as legal adviser to the rebel military officers occupying the National Palace between 24 and 27 April. Saldana is closely connected to the APCJ and is reported to have used his military connections during 1963 to obtain weapons for the APCJ. APCJ and MPD leaders are known to have been in communication with Saldana on 27 April and at other times.

25. Thus by the night of April 26 the rebellion was undergoing a rapid evolution. The Communist militants among the rebel forces had established their credentials as effective and ruthless leaders. They were recruiting supporters with sound trucks and manufacturing Molotov cock-tails for use against Wessin's tanks. This latter task was a specialty of PSPD members. APCJ activists organized in patrols were arresting "political prisoners" and often meting out rough justice on the spot.

26. At the same time the loyalist forces who had been badly disunited and disorganized were finally beginning to buckle down to the business of blasting out the rebel-held areas of the city. The rebellion had turned a corner, or rather two corners: the pressure on the rebels was becoming more intense--and the political character of the rebel movement was moving left.

The Rebellion - Second Phase - April 26 - April 29

27. Monday, April 26, was the last day of the short-lived Molina rebel government. The day began with vigorous bombardments of the downtown area of Santo Domingo by loyalist planes and naval

guns. While heavy casualties were being sustained in the rebel sectors, members of the PSPD were meeting at the home of Nicolas Pichardo Viciosio to plan the destruction of the city by fire if Wessin's troops entered. This was apparently characteristic of the Communists' doggedness during this bleakest hour for the rebels. Before the night was over it had become the dominant mood of the workers' quarters embittered by the bombing raids. Some of the military rebels apparently had had enough, but they were relieved of their weapons by rebels before being allowed to defect to the loyalists.

28. The principal defections at this stage of the rebellion besides that of Molina were those of Jose Pena Gomez, Colonel Hernando Ramirez, and Antonio Martinez Francisco, the secretary general of the PRD. After he had withdrawn from the rebel camp and taken refuge, Jose Pena Gomez, a prominent PRD leader, admitted privately that he considered his movement to have been defeated. He admitted that the Communists who joined the rebel force had infiltrated into positions of importance and that it was very difficult to stop them. Molina, who took asylum in the Colombian Embassy, is reported to have said on 5 May that he wanted to get the truth of Communist infiltration across to the world, but that he could not face further jeopardizing his and his family's safety. He reportedly said that he was already under intense attack by the Communists for opposing them. Also, he was reluctant to make any statement that would force him to give up asylum.

29. Martinez made his way out of the rebel lines and on April 28th addressed the nation over San Isidro radio, controlled by the forces of General Wessin y Wessin. In that broadcast, Martinez said: "I beg all to lay down their arms; turn them in to the nearest military post, because this is no longer a fight between political parties."

30. The various Communist organizations now were definitely setting the tone of the rebellion. Communists led attacks on police barracks in a drive to win control of available weapons and supervise their disposition. It was the MPD which spearheaded the attack on the police fortress on the Ozama River. The fall of the fortress on 29 April meant a fresh supply of arms and ammunition for the Communist and extremist groups. Executions of captured police and other loyalists were undertaken without trial, and Communist literature was turned out on the presses of the captured newspaper Prensa Libre. Foreign banks were looted. Most importantly for the rebels, the loyalists began to falter. Indeed the rebels were gaining the upper hand in Santo Domingo when the marines landed and the situation stabilized.

31. It seems clear now as it did in the last days of April that a modest number of hard core Communist leaders in Santo Domingo--83 have so far been identified as active participants by US observers and informants--managed by superior training and tactics to win for themselves a position of considerable influence in the revolt within the first few days. Their influence within the movement grew day by day, and following the collapse of Molina's government on 27 April there appeared to be no organization within the rebel camp capable of denying them full control of the rebellion within a very few days.

32. At the same time, the rebel cause, enjoying as it did the backing of Bosch and the continued support of several thousand military personnel, seemed likely to prosper in the face of the ineffective and dispirited countermeasures of the loyalists military.

33. Thus the prospect at the time [] clearly was one in which a movement increasingly under the influence of Castroites and other Communists was threatening to gain the ascendancy in the Dominican Republic.

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